

## Message Text

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INFO AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 KATHMANDU 0835

LIMDIS

EE.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, PFOR, NP, IN, CH, UN

SUBJECT: NEPALESE POLITICS ON THE EVE OF THE CORONATION

1. SUMMARY: AFTER A PROLONGED PERIOD OF UNCERTAINTY AND RISING DISCONTENT GROWING OUT OF DIFFERENCES WITH INDIA, THE RIGIDITIES OF THE PANCHAYAT POLITICAL STRUCTURE, TERRORIST INCIDENTS AND INTERNAL INFLATION, THE ATMOSPHERE IN NEPAL IN THIS PRECORONATION PERIOD SEEMS TO BE SOMEWHAT MORE OPTIMISTIC AND TRANQUIL THAN IT WAS SIX MONTHS AGO. THIS OPTIMISM IS PROBABLY TRANSITORY AND THE TRANQUILITY MAY BE ILLUSORY. AT LEAST LIMITED POLITICAL REFORMS ARE IN THE OFFING AND DIFFICULT ECONOMIC NEGOTIATIONS WITH INDIA ARE SCHEDULED FOR MARCH. LONG-TERM STRUCTURAL PROBLEMS REMAIN; THE EXILES RETAIN A TERRORIST CAPABILITY AND THE INDIANS MAY DECIDE TO MAKE A MORE INTENSIVE EFFORT TO MODIFY THE POLITICAL STRUCTURE IN NEPAL. IN THIS SITUATION THE NEPALESE ARE LOOKING TO THIRD PARTIES FOR SUPPORT AND REASSURANCE AND ARE CONCERNED BY WHAT THEY PERCEIVE TO BE A DECLINING US ROLE. IN THE MONTHS AND  
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YEARS TO COME WE WILL NEED TO SEEK WAYS TO REASSURE THEM

THAT THERE HAS BEEN NO FUNDAMENTAL CHANGE IN OUR BASIC SUPPORT FOR THE INDEPENDENT DEVELOPMENT OF NEPAL. SUCH REASSURANCE COULD CONTRIBUTE DIRECTLY TO THE REGIONAL STABILITY AND COOPERATIVE INTER-STATE RELATIONSHIPS WHICH WE SEEK. END SUMMARY.

2. INTERNAL POLITICAL. SIX MONTHS AGO THE KING FACED A RISING LEVEL OF POLITICAL DISSATISFACTION, AN UNCERTAIN LAW AND ORDER SITUATION AND AN ECONOMY STRUGGLING WITH INFLATION AND THE IMPACT OF SHORTAGES IN A WIDE VARIETY OF COMMODITIES. POLITICAL LEADERS OPPOSED TO THE PRESENT PANCHAYAT SYSTEM WERE BECOMING MORE VOCAL. INCREASING VIOLENCE WAS BEING CARRIED OUT BY NEPALI CONGRESS PARTY EXILES WHOSE EFFORTS, INCLUDING TERRORIST ACTS, THREATENED TO DISRUPT THE CORONATION. ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL PRESSURE FROM INDIA WAS ON THE HORIZON IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE SIKKIM DISTURBANCE.

3. NOW, ON THE EVE OF THE CORONATION THE KING CAN TAKE SOME SATISFACTION FROM THE FACT THAT MANY, IF NOT ALL, OF THESE POLITICAL PROBLEMS HAVE DIMINISHED OR BEEN TEMPORARILY DEFUSED. BY ANNOUNCING THE FORMATION OF A CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM COMMISSION TO REVIEW AND RECOMMEND POSSIBLE CHANGES WITHIN SIX MONTHS, THE KING HAS ACHIEVED A TRUCE WITH HIS OPPONENTS AND HAS GONE A LONG WAY TOWARD CHANNELING THIS OPPOSITION INTO PALACE APPROVED (AND CONTROLLED) MECHANISMS. BIRENDRA HAS APPOINTED A BROAD SPECTRUM OF THE BODY POLITIC TO THE COMMISSION INCLUDING ADVOCATES OF THE STATUS QUO, A PRO-MAOIST COMMUNIST, AND AN ASSOCIATE OF THE MODERATE WING OF THE BANNED NEPALI CONGRESS PARTY. IN DOING SO HE HAS SOUGHT TO WIN THEIR AGREEMENT TO WORK WITHIN "THE SYSTEM" AND THEIR COMMITMENT TO GIVE PEACEFUL REFORM A CHANCE.

4. AS FOR THE NCP EXILES IN INDIA, EVEN THEIR LEADER B.P. KOIRALA HAS BEEN CAREFUL NOT TO ATTACK THE KING'S REFORM MEASURES DIRECTLY. DESPITE CONTINUING DIFFERENCES IN INDO-NEPAL RELATIONS THERE IS NO EVIDENCE THAT THE GOI HAS RELAXED ITS RESTRICTIONS ON NCP ACTIVITY WITHIN A 50 MILE ZONE ALONG THE BORDER. THE THREATS OF A  
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RISING TIDE OF VIOLENCE TO CULMINATE IN SOME DRAMATIC ACT DURING THE CORONATION HAVE ABATED, FOLLOWING THE FAILURE OF A NCP ATTEMPT TO SEIZE TERRITORY NEAR NAMCHE BAZAR LAST DECEMBER. THE OKHALDHUNGA INCIDENT MAY HAVE BEEN A LAST DESPERATE ATTEMPT BY KOIRALA'S FOLLOWERS TO PUT PRESSURE ON THE KING. HAVING FAILED, THE NCP'S BEST CHOICE MAY BE TO ALLOW THE CORONATION TO PROCEED PEACEFULLY AND ATTEMPT TO OBTAIN

A SHARE OF POLITICAL POWER THROUGH WHATEVER MECHANISM MAY EMERGE FROM THE CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM PROCESS. WHILE THIS MAY BE AN OVERLY OPTIMISTIC VIEW OF KOIRALA'S CAPABILITIES AND INTENTIONS, KATHMANDU APPEARS PEACEFUL AND THE THREAT OF VIOLENCE IN THE CORONATION PERIOD SEEMS TO HAVE DIMINISHED. EVEN IF THE CORONATION PERIOD PASSES PEACEFULLY VIOLENCE COULD HOWEVER REMERGE IN THE POST-CORONATION PERIOD AND COULD UNDERMINE PRESENT OPTIMISM.

5. IF BIRENDRA HAS ACHIEVED SOMETHING OF A TRUCE WITH DIVERSE POLITICAL ELEMENTS, HE IS STILL A LONG WAY FROM WINNING THEIR SUPPORT FOR THE PANCHAYAT SYSTEM. THERE IS CONSIDERABLE SKEPTICISM AS TO WHAT WILL EMERGE FROM THE COMMISSION'S WORK, AND FEW DOUBT THAT THE KING WILL CONTINUE TO HOLD THE UPPER HAND. BUT AT THIS STAGE THE GENERAL POLITICAL ATMOSPHERE IS ONE OF GIVING IT A CHANCE, A WILLINGNESS TO LET THE PALACE'S PROCESS WORK IN THE HOPES THAT SOME SORT OF DELICATE NATIONAL CONSENSUS WILL EMERGE. THE KING HAS MANAGED TO BUY SIX MONTHS GRACE; FEW WILL BEGRUDGE HIM THAT.

6. NEPAL AND INDIA. SURROUNDED ON THREE SIDES BY INDIA AND DEPENDENT ON HER FOR ITS ECONOMIC SURVIVAL, NEPAL CONTINUES TO VIEW INDIA'S INTENTIONS WITH SUSPICION AND GROWING ANXIETY. ALTHOUGH THE IMMEDIATE CAUSE FOR THE CURRENT RIFT LIES IN THE NEPALESE REACTION TO INDIA'S DECISION LAST SUMMER TO "ASSOCIATE" SIKKIM WITH THE INDIAN FEDERATION, THE ROOT CAUSES ARE MUCH DEEPER. THERE IS A NAGGING FEAR IN KATHMANDU THAT INDIA'S COMMITMENT TO THE MONARCHY IS WEAKENING, THAT DELHI WOULD PREFER TO SEE A MORE DEMOCRATIC REGIME EMERGE IN NEPAL, AND THAT CONSEQUENTLY ECONOMIC PRESSURE IS LIKELY TO INTENSIFY. CONFIDENTIAL

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FM AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU

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7. ON THE ECONOMIC FRONT WHILE INFLATION REMAINS A SERIOUS PROBLEM AND DIFFICULTIES WITH INDIA ARE STILL TO BE SORTED OUT, A BREATHING SPELL HAS BEEN ACHIEVED. THE FLOW OF GOODS HAS RESUMED AND NEGOTIATIONS ABOUT THE FUTURE TRADE RELATIONSHIP ARE SCHEDULED FOR EARLY MARCH. (A DETAILED ANALYSIS OF THE ECONOMIC SITUATION IS CONTAINED SEPTTEL.)

8. DESPITE THE VISIT TO INDIA LATE LAST YEAR BY PRIME MINISTER RIJAL, THERE HAS YET BEEN NO FUNDAMENTAL COMING TO GRIPS WITH THE NATURE OF THE RELATIONSHIP WITH INDIA. INDIA HAS REITERATED ITS BELIEF THAT IT IS UP TO KATHMANDU TO DEFINE WHAT SORT OF RELATIONSHIP IT WANTS. INHERENT IN THAT STATEMENT IS THE THREAT THAT IF NEPAL WANTS TO DIFFER WITH DELHI ON CRUCIAL POLITICAL ISSUES (SUCH AS SIKKIM, A NUCLEAR FREE ZONE IN SOUTH ASIA OR THE RIGHTS OF LANDLOCKED STATES) IT SHOULD EXPECT TO BE INDEPENDENT IN OTHER AREAS AS WELL, INCLUDING ECONOMIC.

9. THE FACT THAT MRS. GHANDI HAS NOT YET REPLIED TO THE KING'S LETTER TO HER OF LAST FALL IS INDICATIVE OF  
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THE KIND OF "NON-DIALOGUE" WHICH MARKS BILATERAL RELATIONS. SIMILARLY THE FAILURE OF INDIAN FOREIGN SECRETARY SINGH TO ACCEPT AN OUTSTANDING INVITATION TO COME TO NEPAL FOR TALKS IS READ AS A SIGN OF INDIA'S CONTINUING DISPLEASURE AND PIQUE. CORONATION PREPARATIONS ARE OFTEN CITED HERE AS THE REASON WHY HIGH LEVEL TALKS HAVE NOT TAKEN PLACE, BUT INDIAN RELUCTANCE APPEARS TO BE A MAJOR FACTOR. AS IN INTERNAL POLITICS, BIRENDRA MAY ALSO BE SEEKING TO BUY TIME BEFORE HAVING TO DEAL WITH DELHI IN THE HOPE THAT

BEFORE SERIOUS NEGOTIATIONS BEGIN HE WILL HAVE OBTAINED A NEW DOMESTIC CONSENSUS AS WELL AS EXTERNAL SUPPORT FROM CHINA AND OTHER FRIENDLY POWERS INCLUDING THE US. THE TIME FOR DIALOGUE, HOWEVER IS RAPIDLY APPROACHING; BOTH THE NEW QUOTA NEGOTIATIONS IN MARCH AND TALKS ON A NEW TRADE AND TRANSIT AGREEMENT IN LATER 1975 OR EARLY 1976 ARE GOING TO BE IMPORTANT INDICATIONS OF HOW FAR INDIA IS WILLING TO CONTINUE TO SUPPORT NEPAL....OR HOW MUCH PRESSURE IT IS PREPARED TO UUSE TO ACHIEVE ITS POLITICAL GOALS AND TO SUPPORT WHAT IT SEEMS TO BE ITS VITAL INTERESTS. WE ARE INCLINED TO BELIEVE THAT NEPAL AT LEAST WILL ENDEAVOR TO BE FLEXIBLE AND TO AVOID A FURTHER CONFRONTATION WITH INDIA IF POSSIBLE. BUT THERE ARE OBVIOUSLY LIMITS BEYOND WHICH BIRENDRA CAN NOT GO IN MAKING NEPALESE POLICY SUBSERVIENT TO INDIAN INTERESTS, FOR EXAMPLE ON QUESTIONS RELATING TO NEPAL'S LANDLOCKED STATUS.

10. NEPAL'S RELATIONS WITH CHINA. ALTHOUGH THE GON IS NOT ATTEMPTING TO PLAY CHINA OFF DIRECTLY AGAINST INDIA (TO DO SO WOULD BE FOOLHARDY, INDEED, GIVEN NEPAL'S OVERWHELMING RELIANCE ON INDIA), IT IS NOT SURPRISING THAT AS RELATIONS WITH DELHI HAVE COOLED, RELATIONS WITH CHINA ARE ON THE UPSWING. THE RECENT CHINESE DECISION TO ASSIST NEPAL IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE POKHARA SURKHET ROAD IS MEANT AS A VERY TANGIBLE EXAMPLE OF CHINA'S SUPPORT FOR AN INDEPENDENT NEPAL. THE ROAD, WHICH WILL REPORTEDLY COST UP TO \$90 MILLION, WILL BE THE LARGEST FOREIGN AID PROJECT EVER UNDERLSKEN IN NEPAL; SHOULD ALL THE FUNDS BE EXPENDED IN THE NEXT FIVE YEAR PLAN BEGINNING IN 1976 THE PRC WILL RIVAL, AND MAY EVEN SURPASS, INDIA AS THE LARGEST FOREIGN AID DONOR IN THE COUNTRY.  
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11. THE ROAD WILL BE BUT THE LATEST IN A SERIES OF LARGE AID PROJECTS UNDERTAKEN BY THE CHINESE. FOR THE MOST PART THESE ARE HIGHLY VISIBLE PROGRAMS (KATHMANDU RING ROAD, TROLLEY BUS LINE TO KHAKTAPUR) ALL OF WHICH ARE DESIGNED TO MAKE THE MAXIMUM PUBLIC IMPACT AND TO UNDERSCORE CHINA'S INTEREST IN NEPAL. TO DATE CHINA HAS LIMITED ITS POLITICAL ROLE IN THE COUNTRY. THE HANDFUL OF PRO-MAOIST COMMUNISTS POSE NO THREAT AND ARE PROBABLY AS CLOSELY CONTROLLED BY PEKING AS THE HMG SECURITY FORCES. PROGAGANDA, WHILE READILY AVAILABLE, REMAINS LOW KEY AND CONTINUES TO EMPHASIZE CHINA'S "GOOD NEIGHBOR" POLICIES TOWARD NEPAL.

12. NEPAL AND THE THIRD WORLD. THERE HAVE BEEN NO SIGNIFICANT SHIFTS IN NEPAL'S LONG-STANDING POLICY OF SUPPORT FOR THE NONALIGNED. NEPAL, A MEMBER OF THE 14 NATION

STEERING COMMITTEE TO THE NONALIGNED, HAS A TENDENCY TO HIDE BEHIND THE MOVEMENT WHEN IT SUITS HER. SUPPORT FOR SIHANOUK'S GRUNK, FOR EXAMPLE HAS LONG BEEN JUSTIFIED ON THE BASIS OF A COMMITMENT MADE AT THE 1973 ALGIERS CONFERENCE, WHEN IN FACT IT AROSE FROM A PERSONAL COMMITMENT MADE BY THE KING TO SIHANOUK IN PEKING IN 1973. NEPAL, HOWEVER, RAMINS A MODERATING INFLUENCE WITHIN THE THIRD WORLD AND HAS PLAYED A USEFUL ROLE IN SUPPORTING US INITIATIVES IN THOSE AREAS IN WHICH ITS VITAL INTERESTS ARE NOT AFFECTED. IT HAS CONSISTENTLY ABSTAINED, FOR EXAMPLE, ON DELICATE QUESTIONS INVOLVING THE MIDDLE EAST, DESPITE A GENERAL DESIRE NOT TO OFFEND THE OIL-RICH COUNTRIES OF THE REGION. NEPAL'S NEUTRALITY ON THE KOREAN QUESTION, TOO, WAS CRUCIAL IN DEFEATING A PRO-NORTH KOREAN EFFORT AT THIS YEAR'S UNGA TO ABOLISH THE UNITED NATIONS COMMAND. THERE IS EVERY REASON TO EXPECT THIS MODERATE STANCE TO CONTINUE, ALTHOUGH OVER TIME THE INEXORABLE FORCE OF NONALIGNED PRESSURE AND A DESIRE TO AVOID ISOLATION WILL PROBABLY SEE A GRADUAL SHIFT IN NEPALESE POLICIES AWAY FROM THE MODERATE POSITIONS OF THE PACT.

13. IMPLICATIONS FOR US POLICY. AMERICAN PRESENCE IN NEPAL IS EXPECIALLY VALUED BY THE GON BECAUSE, UNLIKE EITHER INDIA OR THE PRC, WE ARE VIEWED AS A DISINTERESTED  
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POWER WHOSE PRESENCE SERVES AS A STABILIZING FACTOR AND AN IMPLICITLY RESTRAINING INFLUENCE ON BOTH OF NEPAL'S ASIAN NEIGHBORS.

14. IN RECENT MONTHS, HOWEVER, SOME SENIOR HMG OFFICIALS HAVE GAINED THE MISTAKEN IMPRESSION THAT OUR INTEREST IN NEPAL IS FLAGGING. THIS IS PARTLY A RESULT OF THEIR INTERPRETATION OF OUR EFFORTS TO IMPROVE RELATIONS WITH INDIA. THE SECRETARY'S EXPLICIT RECOGNITION OF INDIA'S DOMINANT ROLE IN THE SUB-CONTINENT HAS BEEN INTERPRETED HERE BY SOME AS A SIGN THAT WE WILL REDUCE OUR COMMITMENTS TO THE PERIPHERAL STATES IN THE AREA. NEPAL, LIKE MANY ASIAN SOCIETIES, IS QUICK TO LOOK AT INDIVIDUAL EVENTS AS SYMBOLIC OF SOME GREATER FORCE AT WORK. THE SECRETARY'S DECISION, FOR EXAMPLE, TO OMIT NEPAL ON HIS SOUTH ASIAN TOUR COUPLED WITH THE FAILURE OF OTHER HIGH US OFFICIALS TO VISIT HAS UNDERLINED NEPAL'S FEARS THAT THE US IS SOMEHOW WITHDRAWING FROM THE COUNTRY. REDUCTIONS IN THE SIZE OF OUR AID MISSION, TOO, HAVE BEEN SEEN BY SOME AS FURTHER EVIDENCE OF A DECLINING US INTEREST.

15. UNDER THESE CIRCUMSTANCES WE SHOULD CONTINUE TO SEEK OPPORTUNITIES TO STRESS TO THE GON THAT US INTEREST IN NEPAL HAS

NOT BEEN REDUCED, THAT NEPAL IS UNIQUE AMONG THE DEVELOPING COUNTRIES IN HAVING A REASONABLY ASSURED LEVEL OF US ASSISTANCE FOR SEVERAL YEARS TO COME AND THAT OUR COMMITMENT TO THE INDEPENDENT DEVELOPMENT OF NEPAL REMAINS UNIMPAIRED. ABOVE ALL, WE MUST CONTINUE TO BE SENSITIVE TO THE PROBLEMS OF A SMALL COUNTRY HEMMED IN BY TWO "QUASI SUPER POWERS." ALTHOUGH WE SHOULD NOT SEEK TO SERVE AS ARBITRATOR BETWEEN NEPAL AND HER NEIGHBORS, WE SHOULD BE WILLING TO LISTEN AND SYMPATHIZE WITH HER DESIRE TO CARVE OUT A POSITION INDEPENDENT OF HER NEIGHBORS AND, AS APPROPRIATE, MAKE THIS FACT KNOWN TO THEM DIRECTLY. SUCH AN EFFORT, WHEN COUPLED WITH GREATER PUBLICITY TO OUR ON-GOING PROGRAMS, SHOULD SIGNIFICANTLY CONTRIBUTE TO A MORE SELF-CONFIDENT NEPAL AND HENCE TO OUR BROADER GOALS OF REGIONAL STABILITY.

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